

Disposition and End-of-Life Options for Personal Computers

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Green Design Initiative Technical Report #97-10
Carnegie Mellon University
July 7, 1997

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Abstract

A widely cited 1991 study predicted that nearly 150 million personal computers (PCs) would be sent to landfills by 2005. Taking into consideration newer end-of-life disposition options now available, the general premise of the original study is reconsidered.

Many fewer computers are being sent to landfills, as many more are being recycled as markets for used computers and electronic equipment develop. Many are still being stored, despite the unprofitable nature of storage. The updated model suggests that nearly 150 million computers will be recycled in 2005— the same number initially predicted to be landfilled. Instead, we predict that only 55 million will be landfilled. In addition, the equivalent of 15 million PCs will be landfilled from the unused portions of the 150 million recycled computers. In essence, the computers sentenced to death in landfills in 1991 have been given a second life in newly established recycled electronic goods markets.

1. Introduction

A 1991 Carnegie Mellon study predicted that 148 million personal computers (PCs) would find their way into U.S. landfills by the year 2005 [CMU 1991]. The study relied on three fundamental assumptions: 10 years of historical U.S. sales data with a forecasted 5% future growth rate, a simple one-stage model of end-of-life disposition, and some predictive assumptions on the future disposition rates of computers. A summary of the results from the initial model are included as Appendix A. However, the three fundamental assumptions do not accurately portray the end-of-life options for PCs as of 1997¹.

First, the sales data used in the original study assumed only a modest 5% growth rate beyond 1991. However, the industry has seen remarkable growth—closer to 15% per year due to rapid operating system and processor upgrade cycles. In fact, 70 million PCs were shipped worldwide last year, 26 million of those in the United States. If the same predictive assumptions were used along with the actual sales data for the last 6 years, and with a future growth rate of 15%, the model would have predicted that 186 million computers would be landfilled by 2005. This number is roughly 25% higher than that without the rapid sales growth. (A summary of the results of updating the old model with actual sales data is in Appendix B).

Second, the 1991 model assumed all PCs would be obsolete in five years, then allowed for reuse, storage, recycling, or landfilling of the products. Storage was further defined, allowing three years of delay until all stored computers were landfilled. The one-stage model used in the original report (shown in Figure 1 below) is inappropriate since computers deemed obsolete by their initial owners often have subsequent value to others, and can remain in productive use for a few more years.

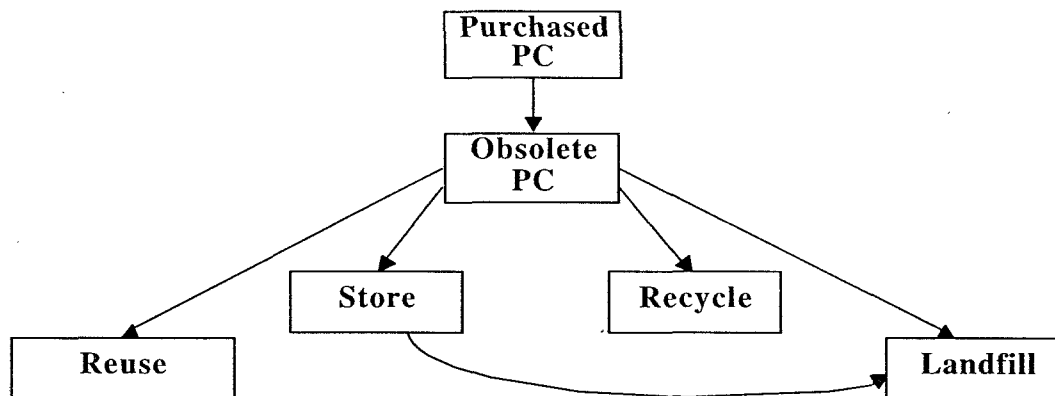


Figure 1 - Flow Diagram of Computers in 1991 Study

The predictive assumptions used in the original study said that obsolete computers would be disposed as follows:

¹ A quick note is made on this point. The 1991 report was the result of a one-semester undergraduate Engineering and Public Policy project course at CMU [of which H.S.M. was an author]. The organization and purpose of the project was to educate aspiring engineers as to the social impact of technology, and to help them understand the quantitative nature of the issue. The translation of an issue into a public lightning rod was a byproduct of this naive effort, and equally enlightening to the young engineers.

| Parameter | Value |
|-------------------------|-------------|
| Lifetime of PC | 5 years |
| % Obsolete Reused | 10 percent |
| % Obsolete Recycled | 1 percent |
| % Obsolete Stockpiled | 80 percent |
| % Obsolete Landfilled | 9 percent |
| Life of Stockpiled PC | 3 years |
| % Stockpiled Landfilled | 100 percent |

Table 1 - Assumptions Used in 1991 PC Disposal Model

Six years have passed since the publication and broad citation of the 1991 study, and we can look at the changes in computer disposal. The single most significant change is the creation of many computer "recycling" firms. However, the "recycling" done by such firms often falls into the categories both of reuse and recycling as defined in the original model. Before proceeding further, we specifically define these two end-of-life activities. Reuse implies that the computer is put back in to service intact or with very minimal modification (such as adding memory). This could happen as a result of the computer being resold to a different user, being reassigned to a different user within a firm, or simply continuing to be used in another capacity by the purchaser. Recycling implies that the computer has in some way been disassembled and sold for raw materials or as separate electronic components.

Computer "recycling" firms, both recycle and reuse products. Some firms actually take obsolete computers, make slight modifications, and place them in schools, non-profits, and charities for extended lifetime use (which is "reuse"). However, some firms actually "recycle" electronic equipment, extracting value from the components or high value materials like gold and other precious metals.

The emergence of these industries has diverted the flow of many computers from the municipal waste stream. However, hard numbers are not readily available which measure the aggregate numbers of computers being diverted into the reuse and recycling industries. In addition, consumers and businesses alike have shown a considerable unwillingness to throw away old electronic products. Instead, computers are often stockpiled in attics and storerooms until space is needed for another purpose. The existence of adequate storage space has contributed to the diversion of computers from landfills as well, as owners have had time to put off the disposition decision long enough for the recycling and reuse markets to mature.

The factors which are shaping the disposition of computers today are important in building an updated model of their fate. Following the three fundamental points of the initial study, we update the sales data to 1997 [Dataquest 9X], and assume the recent growth rate of 15% per year continues. Next, we propose a multiple-stage model, summarized below in Figure 2. Finally, as mentioned previously the actual number of computers being reused, recycled, stored, and landfilled is not available, thus estimates of these activities are made using both by extrapolation of individual recycling firm data, as well as by making qualitative assessments of the level of activity.

2. An Updated Model

The arrows in Figure 2 define the pathways of computers in our updated multi-stage model. A new computer is purchased, and eventually becomes obsolete. At that time, there are four options to the owner of the computer. First, it could be reused. This means that it is somehow used again after becoming obsolete to the purchaser—possibly a result of being resold or reassigned to another user without extensive modification. Second, the computer could be stored by the original owner. In this case, it is serving no purpose except to occupy space. Third, the computer could be recycled. We define this to mean that the product is taken apart and individual materials or subassemblies are sold for scrap. (Recall our earlier comments about recycling firm activities). Finally, the computer could be landfilled.

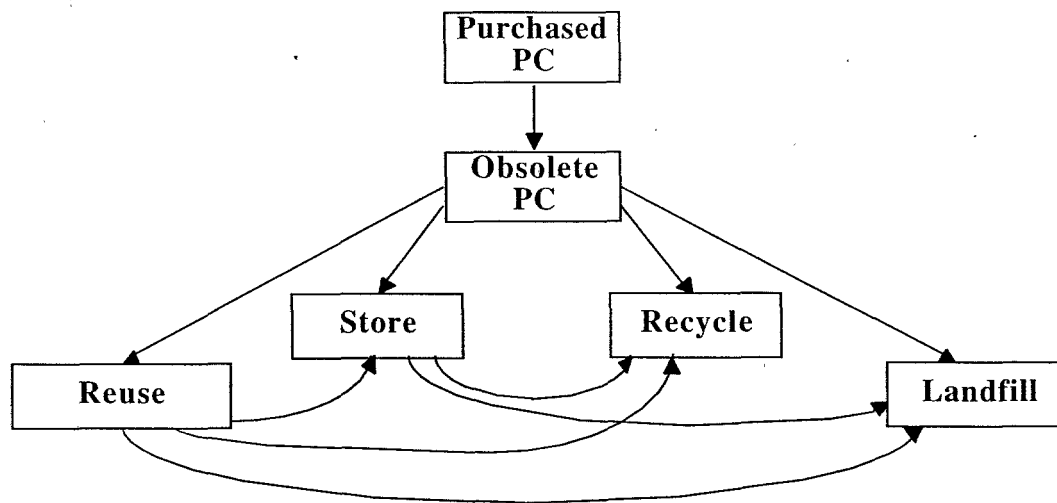


Figure 2 - Flow Diagram of Computers in Updated Study

In our model, the reuse and storage options are only intermediate stages in the lifecycle of a computer. Only recycling and landfilling are terminal points. Notice that our model allows a computer to be purchased, reused, stored, and finally recycled or landfilled.

The final update is in suggesting the percentages of computers which follow the various end-of-life options. We continue to assume that computers generally become obsolete to the purchaser in five years. This assumption is one of the few assumptions carried over from the original model, and is supported inside the industry and outside by market research firms like Dataquest and International Data Corporation (IDC), who use it to predict product and processor upgrade paths in the personal computer industry. If not landfilled or recycled after becoming obsolete, reuse and storage allow for three more years in that capacity, implying the products are eight years old when leaving that step in the process. Stored computers are recycled or landfilled after eight years. Reused computers can be recycled or landfilled after 8 years; or they can be stored for three more years before then being landfilled or recycled, for a total of eleven years.

The first level of assumptions requires us to determine the percentages of obsolete computers being reused, recycled, stored, and landfilled. Since no strict data on this is available, two observations were used. First, the prior "doom and gloom" prediction of mass volumes of obsolete computers being landfilled by now has not been realized. Very few computers are seen to be entering the municipal waste stream. Second, articles and interviews of computer recycling firms show few computers less than five years old being processed. Thus, recycling and landfilling at the top level was assumed to be almost negligible. In addition, experience with corporate and individual users indicated roughly a 1:1 choice between reuse and stockpiling after five years. Thus, the remaining obsolete computers are assumed to be split evenly between the two options.

Reused machines are eight year old equipment which are now of no use to the owner. They are either recycled, stockpiled, or landfilled. Again, large quantities are not seen to be entering landfills and the percent being landfilled is assumed to be small. Similarly, large numbers of eight year old machines are not being recycled. Thus the majority are assumed to be stored for later disposition, with the remaining units recycled.

Finally, stored machines are assumed to have been deemed obsolete by the user, else they would have been reused. Similarly, they must have been seen to have some relative value— or they would have been recycled or landfilled earlier. Thus storing is merely an activity which the user does in order to potentially extract future value from obsolete computers. At this point (which happens between eight and eleven years after initial purchase) little chance of effectively reusing this equipment is seen. Most of these machines end up being transplanted to computer recycling firms, yet some are still landfilled. It should be noted that most likely this recycled or landfilled decision is more likely made

on a volume basis rather than a unit basis. For example, a user might elect to throw away 25% of the original system, but recycle the remaining 75%. If anything, the percent landfilled is probably lower than this amount. About one-half of the contribution of landfilled computers annually in this model will come from stockpiled computers.

Based on these assumptions, the following parameters were assigned to variables in the model. Parameters used in the original model are presented as well.

| Parameters | Old Value | New Value |
|---------------------------|-------------|------------|
| Initial Lifetime of PC | 5 years | 5 years |
| % Obsolete Reused | 10 percent | 45 percent |
| % Obsolete Recycled | 1 percent | 5 percent |
| % Obsolete Stockpiled | 80 percent | 45 percent |
| % Obsolete Landfilled | 9 percent | 5 percent |
| Lifetime of Reused PC | 3 years | 3 years |
| % Reused Recycled | N/A | 40 percent |
| % Reused Stockpiled | N/A | 50 percent |
| % Reused Landfilled | N/A | 10 percent |
| Lifetime of Stockpiled PC | 3 years | 3 years |
| % Stored Recycled | 0 percent | 75 percent |
| % Stored Landfilled | 100 percent | 25 percent |

Table 2 - Assumptions Used in Disposition Models

Using this new formulation of the model, a very different picture of the computer disposition issue is seen. The original model predicted that cumulatively 340 million computers would be sold and 148 million landfilled in the U.S. by 2005. Our updated model predicts over 680 million sold but only 55 million computers landfilled in the U.S. by that time. Finally, we predict that 143 million will be recycled rather than the original 2 million. In short, the computers originally headed for landfills will be recycled. The number of computers landfilled will be roughly equal to the number sold through 1989, when recycling markets were just being formed and there were few end-of-life options for obsolete equipment. Appendix C shows a summary of the updated model.

3. Implications for Product Takeback

A more interesting statistic than either the number of computers recycled or landfilled is the number which are available for product takeback. Product takeback is an emerging international paradigm which requires that firms organize methods to reclaim their products at the end of their useful life. Seven European countries have some form of takeback legislation enacted already, and firms are becoming increasingly aware of the possibility that they will be required to comply. In this model, the number available for takeback is defined as those which have either been landfilled or are currently in storage. In 2005, despite increased recycling efforts, 80 million computers will still be available for takeback.

To more completely understand the environmental impacts of personal computer systems, they should be broken down into their major subcomponents: motherboards, cases, drives, monitors, and user input devices. This breakdown is basically unchanged since 1991, other than the fact that CD-ROM drives are now a standard part of all systems. This is the definition used in subsequent analysis.

It has probably become apparent to the reader that storing obsolete computers is inadvisable, since their value will only decrease over time, until they are worth only the sum of their raw materials. The residual value of materials in old electronic equipment soon after production is only 1-5% of the original cost of the equipment [MCC 96, Matthews 97]. Storing an old computer instead of quickly reusing or recycling it is not a profit-maximizing or cost-effective solution. Holding on to an obsolete computer without getting some benefit out of it is akin to holding on to a stock of a company which is known to be going bankrupt— in either case you end up with nothing, and have full knowledge of this fact ahead of time.

Further complicating the issue of storage is that many computers which are well beyond anyone's definition of "useful life" can only be disassembled for raw materials. Often, choosing this option requires paying a fee to a computer recycler just to comply with local regulations banning disposal. Thus, reuse and recycling need to be more forcefully promoted as options to maximize lifecycle values of machines.

4. Implications for Landfills

Our updated model predicts that 55 million whole PCs will be landfilled by 2005. In addition, some portion of the 143 million recycled computers will also be landfilled. In this section, we estimate the mass of PCs and related material that will be landfilled over time.

Our totals of PC sales include both desktop and laptop machines. A desktop machine weighs roughly 50 lbs. (23 kg) and occupies about 3 cubic feet (0.1 cubic meters) of space. A laptop machine weighs roughly 7.5 lbs. (3.5 kg) and occupies 0.14 cubic feet of space. The fraction of laptops in PC sales is 20% percent (and growing at an annual rate of 20%). Based on personal discussions with several recycling firms, we estimate that 10% of recycled PCs by weight are landfilled.

Compared with a 1991-era computer, these numbers are increasing, mostly because new technologies (e.g. CD-ROM) are being incorporated as standard components, and monitors are getting bigger. A computer system sold in 1991 was defined as weighing 30 pounds and occupying 2 cubic feet of space. Due to the increasing growth in sales, we assume that the typical system is more like the system of today, and use it in calculating landfill requirements.

Using our prediction of 55 million whole PCs being landfilled by 2005, we further state that 80% are desktop systems and 20% are laptops (conservatively following sales data). Thus the "weighted average" landfilled machine weighs 42 pounds (19.1 kg) and occupies a volume of 2.4 cubic feet. The 55 million whole PCs landfilled will require 135 million cubic feet of landfill space, and the 10% of scrap recycled computers will require an additional 35 million cubic feet by 2005, for a total of 170 million cubic feet. As a reference point, this volume is roughly one acre piled 4 thousand feet high.

5. Sensitivity Analysis

The following table shows the result of independently making a +1% change in each of the percent distribution assumptions used in the model and equally compensating that increase across the other inputs. Note that these are not percentage point changes. For example, “% Obsolete Reused” is considered as increasing from 45% to 45.45%, while “% Obsolete Recycled and Landfilled” fall from 5% to 4.85%, and % Obsolete Stockpiled falls to 44.85%. The columns are the resulting percent changes which appear in the model as of year 2005 (cumulative for number recycled and landfilled, and as available for takeback in that year). Thus a 1% increase in the percent of obsolete computers reused leads to 0.10% less computers cumulatively recycled, 0.72% less cumulatively landfilled, and 0.06% fewer available for takeback.

| Assumption Gradient | Δ Recycled | Δ Landfilled | Δ Takeback |
|-----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Obsolete Computers | | | |
| % Obsolete Reused | -0.10 % | -0.72 % | -0.06% |
| % Obsolete Recycled | 0.08% | -0.13 % | -0.03 % |
| % Obsolete Stockpiled | 0.01 % | -0.56 % | 0.56 % |
| % Obsolete Landfilled | -0.07 % | 0.27 % | 0 |
| Reused Computers | | | |
| % Reused Recycled | 0.20 % | -0.38 % | -0.12 % |
| % Reused Stockpiled | -0.01 % | -0.29 % | 0.20 % |
| % Reused Landfilled | -0.04 % | 0.16 % | 0 |
| Stored Computers | | | |
| % Stored Recycled | 0.63 % | -1.62 % | -0.16% |
| % Stored Landfilled | -0.21 % | 0.54 % | 0.06 % |

Table 3 - Sensitivity Analysis of Assumptions in Model

Of these results, only the 1.62% fewer computers landfilled as a result of increasing the percentage of stored computers being recycled (in boldface) seems significant. However, this result comes partially because of the already high magnitude of the initial assumption (75%, increased to 75.75%), which is almost twice the size of the next highest percentage in the model, and partly due to the fact that more than half of all obsolete computers pass through the storage stage.

One of the primary limitations of this model is the lack of flexibility with respect to assigning different parameter values for every year of computer sales in the United States. For example, it is clear that computers sold in 1980 faced a distinctly different set of end-of-life options than those sold in 1996, and did not have the same average useful life. However, the relatively low number of sales in early years are dominated by the large numbers in recent years, and this point becomes lost by volume.

Another limitation is the assumption of a continued 15% growth rate. This leads to a prediction in sales of 93 million units in 2005. However, the U.S. population will be roughly 300 million by then, so this would represent an unrealistic one computer sold for every 3 persons. However, given the time horizon of the model, adjusting sales growth to a more conservative 12% has little effect on the final environmental impacts. Under this rate, only 73 million new units will be sold in 2005, and the numbers of units recycled and landfilled fall less than 1% - to 142 million and 55 million, respectively. Note that this is almost entirely a result of the time horizon of 5 years until a computer becomes obsolete. So the sales growth rates affect only the years 1998-2000. If the model were extended an additional 5 years, there would be a much higher discrepancy.

6. Industrial Progress Since Initial Report

The updated model presents a much improved picture of the environmental impact of obsolete computers. However, the reduced impact has come more as a result of the emergence of third-party recyclers than from specific progress made by manufacturers. The 1991 study specifically outline several areas where work needed to be done to improve the environmental quality of computer products. Following is a list of the design issues mentioned and progress to date in those areas.

Design for Environment Programs

The key to successfully improving environmental quality of any product is to make informed decisions at the design stage. So called Design for Environment (DFE) or Green Design programs maximize use of resources, and also ensure that corporate environmental goals are met in a timely manner. Most major computer manufacturers (Apple, HP, IBM) have environmental design programs in place and publicize their efforts. In addition, Compaq has been selected to receive the 1997 World Environment Center Gold Medal for International Corporate Environmental Achievement in recognition of the company's exceptional performance in environmental, health, and safety leadership and proactive stances towards meeting international regulation far ahead of their competitors.

Modular Design and Upgradeability

Modular Design and Upgradeability is intended to alleviate some of the need to constantly upgrade equipment, and thus, to reduce potential waste. Although most computers can be partially upgraded by swapping components like larger drives, few computers exist with appropriate price-performance upgrade paths, and even fewer are able to be traded in for newer models. The only options on the Intel-platform are generally limited to ranges of processor performance, and require relatively costly upgrades for little performance benefit (typically several hundred dollars for a modest gain).

However, Apple's PowerMac 7500 series was designed for upgradeability right out of the box. Even the original computer comes with the processor on a "daughtercard" attached to the motherboard. Upgrading is as simple as changing daughtercards and is very inexpensive - roughly \$100 for twice the power. Although full upgradeability can never exist due to rapidly changing architectures, an option like this helps to extend the life of computers.

Component Reuse

In the absence of upgrade paths for most equipment, reuse needs to be seen as a viable option. Most subsystems (e.g. drives, memory, keyboards) are designed to last well beyond the 5-year useful life of the overall computer system. This is an awkward situation as the whole system sits idle while its subsystems could be reassigned, yet the purchaser paid more for components which will far outlast the system. Many of these components could be resold to increase the value.

Materials Selection

One of the more important reasons for concerning ourselves with materials selection is in preventing the use of toxic materials. Generally speaking, it will be impossible to remove all toxics from the design of computers. However, the initial report specifically mentioned a few toxics and their uses. We reconsider these examples and update the progress made. Overall, materials choices fall into three categories:

- Materials not necessary for operation (Class I)
- Materials necessary for operation and expensive to replace (Class II)
- Materials necessary but with no easy replacement (Class III)

Class I materials choices mentioned in the 1991 study included the Lead shielding for CPU cases. Much progress has been made in this area. Manufacturers have switched to cases which use more plastic for shielding, as well as using metals other than Lead. Class II materials included PCP in capacitors, Cadmium in batteries, lead solder on circuit boards, and Mercury in batteries and switches. Some progress has been made in this category, but mostly through reduction efforts. Cadmium is still present in rechargeable portable computer batteries, as are traces of Mercury, but each in lower quantities. Nickel-Cadmium (NiCd) technology continues to be the most widespread choice in the industry, although other options such as Nickel-metal-hydride (NiMH) exist. Lead solder is still a standard part of circuit board fabrication, but again, less is being used due to technology advances. Finally, Class III materials like Phosphorous in monitors, Copper-plastic interface cables, and Silicon and Arsenic in integrated circuits, are still standard in products. Little progress has been made in removing these materials from design other than through reduction. Thankfully, projections of widespread use of Gallium-Arsenide (GaAs) technology have proved premature.

An interesting side-effect of the continued use of metals in the design of computers is that they account for a high percentage of the end-of-life value of products. The more metals present (e.g. Aluminum), the higher the reclamation value for a recycling firm. Ironically, as metals are successfully replaced, there will be less incentive for recycling to occur. Metals account for over 70% of the residual value of computers [MCC 96, Matthews 97].

Aside from materials selection improvements, progress has been made in subsystem recycling. This advance has come in part through legislation like EPA's 1992 decision to ban the landfill disposal of cathode ray tubes (CRTs). As a result, monitor and CRT recycling has made great advances. This is significant because monitors contribute nearly 50% of the mass and volume of computer systems, and contain toxics Lead, Phosphorus, Cadmium, and Mercury. Glass, circuit boards, and wiring from both CRTs and standard televisions are reclaimed in great quantities every year (at least 85% of reclaimed monitors are recycled), reducing the volume of landfill waste from monitors [Envirocycle 97].

Even with these recycling technology advances, there are considerable obstructions to successfully entering the market. A company electing to reclaim old electronic products is classified as a "hazardous waste handler" by EPA regulations. Improvements need to be made which provide regulatory relief for companies which seek to both reduce landfill waste and improve environmental quality. EPA's Common Sense Initiative is a good starting point for changing the perception and classification of recyclers as hazardous waste facilities.

Labeling and Materials Recovery

Individual firms have followed International Standards Organization (ISO) guidelines with respect to labeling parts. IBM has labeled all plastic parts of their computers so that they can be easily identified at end-of-life, using ISO specifications as well as supplier information. Such efforts have, for the most part, caused manufacturers to realize the benefits in reducing the number of materials used (namely, plastics) in their products.

In addition, the electronic industry has made considerable progress in setting up reverse logistic networks and reclamation facilities to extract value from end-of-life equipment. Digital, Lucent, and IBM all have corporate- centers in place to process obsolete electronic equipment.

7. Policy Directions

In the last decade, many industry groups and worldwide environmental quality specifications have been created (e.g. Energy Star, Germany's Blue Angel, etc.) However it is still basically up to the user to preserve the environment at product end-of-life. Standards like Energy Star (EPA's Electronic Industry Pollution Prevention project) have definitely reduced the energy requirements of computers, but aside from reduced emissions in electricity generation, little product benefit has occurred.

For real environmental quality improvements to occur, one or more of the following issues will need to gain industry acceptance: green marketing, supplier management, promotion of recycling, and resource recovery. Each of these issues is now discussed in more detail.

Green Marketing

Products which are of higher environmental quality than their alternatives need to be allowed to be marketed as such without fear of FTC action. Many products in the industry fall into this category, such as IBM's PS/2e, which was designed to be more easily disassembled than other computers at the time. So far, little benefit has been realized from green marketing. One factor preventing green marketing's success is a general degree of unwillingness amongst manufacturers to improve environmental quality if it costs more. Generally, firms are only willing to spend 0.1% more on a product to improve environmental quality [Lave 96]. While it is clearly no surprise that firms want to control costs, it will be difficult to differentiate products in the future without a commensurate investment in design.

Supplier Management

As international environmental quality specifications take hold, electronic firms will need to work in tandem with their suppliers to ensure that the final environmental footprint of the product is in accordance with all regulations. The primary means by which this will occur is by tightening the information linkages between suppliers and manufacturers. Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) like HP and IBM are already querying subsystem manufacturers like Intel and Quantum regarding the materials, chemicals, and processes used. Subsystem manufacturers are now querying their own suppliers regarding the same issues. As these relationships grow, significant environmental benefits should be seen as the entire industry seeks to reduce environmental impacts.

Recycling Promotion

As mentioned above, used electronic equipment loses value quickly. Generally speaking, computers depreciate at a rate of 40% per year. Manufacturers are aware of this and realize the environmental burden of their products. Yet there has been no major effort to adopt an industry-wide initiative to promote computer recycling. The Electronics Industry Association (EIA) would be a natural choice to organize such a program.

Endorsing such a program could be as simple as adding a line in user manuals or attaching stickers to all new computers informing users (a majority of whom are replacing equipment) of the value in recycling obsolete electronics while still valuable. The longer a disposition decision is delayed, the more costly it will be to the company, until eventually they will have to pay for removal. This type of endorsement could serve two purposes: to publicize the firm's environmental awareness, and to increase the percentage of computers recycled.

Changes in government procurement and disposition procedures would be helpful as well. Currently there are restrictions in government procurement guidelines preventing purchase of recycled products. Also, many products purchased by the government can not be donated or otherwise reused, requiring long-term storage of obsolete equipment.

Resource Recovery and Product Takeback

Although several major manufacturers have the ability to reclaim materials from products, most such reclamation is being done by third-party groups. Although this inevitably meets the goal of preventing disposal, manufacturers thus have little incentive to try to design products that use non-virgin materials. Resource recovery programs are critical to closing the loop towards having a steady supply of non-virgin materials for manufacturers.

Large firms will sometime negotiate takeback pricing for old equipment (in the \$50 range), but such a decision soon becomes moot as donation firms will give \$100 or more tax credits for the same equipment. This fact underlies the economics of the situation— that personal computers are relatively expensive to completely recycle and there are small gains, whereas mainframe computers can be disassembled easily and with high returns. Note that this research has not even considered the potential environmental impacts or feasibility of software package recycling.

Firms with the logistics available to take back products should capitalize on this and incorporate outreach programs to fill capacity. Many firms donate old equipment to charity— why not promote recycling by launching "computer drive-off" programs, where empty trailers are left at schools to be filled with old equipment. In exchange for filling a certain number of trailers, the manufacturer provides "new" equipment to the school. Consumers have shown a remarkable willingness to provide computers for schools via grocery store receipt collection. Such programs could further inform the public about the incentives to recycling old equipment.

8. Conclusions

Much has changed and been learned in the 6 years since the publication of the initial report. To summarize, the growth rate of the computer industry has been much more dramatic than expected. Consumers are buying more portable computers than ever (20% of sales and growing). Also, more computers are being stored by users making costly decisions about disposition. Finally, electronic reclamation businesses are flourishing with a constant stream of obsolete products, thereby reducing the numbers of units going to landfills, and increasing the number available for takeback. As

mandatory takeback goes into effect around the world, such reclamation activities will become strategically valuable.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to thank O. Dewey Pitts and J. Ray Kirby of IBM's Engineering Center for Environmentally Conscious Products (ECECP) in Research Triangle Park, NC for their guidance on this project.

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Carnegie Mellon University Green Design Initiative Technical Report #97-10

1991 EPP "Design Issues for Waste Avoidance" Study Model

| Parameter | Units | Value | YEAR | NEW SALES (thousands) | NUM OBSOLETE (thousands) | NUM OBS RESOLD (thousands) | NUM OBS RECYCLED (thousands) | NUM OBS TO STOCKPILE (thousands) | NUM OBS LANDFILLED (thousands) | TOTAL LANDFILLED (thousands) | TOTAL STOCKPILED (thousands) |
|-----------------------|----------|-------|------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Lifetime of PC | years | 5 | 1981 | 1500 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| % Obsolete Resold | percent | 10 | 1982 | 2000 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| % Obsolete Recycled | percent | 1 | 1983 | 2500 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| % Obsolete Stockpiled | percent | 80 | 1984 | 3250 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| % Obsolete Landfilled | percent | 9 | 1985 | 4500 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Life of Stockpiled PC | years | 3 | 1986 | 6000 | 1500 | 150 | 15 | 1200 | 135 | 135 | 1200 |
| Volume of PC | cu. ft | 2 | 1987 | 7500 | 2000 | 200 | 20 | 1600 | 180 | 180 | 2800 |
| Power Cons of PC | watts | 200 | 1988 | 9000 | 2500 | 250 | 25 | 2000 | 225 | 225 | 4800 |
| 1 sq mile ft | acre ft. | 640 | 1989 | 10000 | 3250 | 325 | 33 | 2600 | 293 | 293 | 6200 |
| 1 Acre ft | cu. ft | 43560 | 1990 | 11000 | 4500 | 450 | 45 | 3600 | 405 | 2005 | 8200 |
| | | | 1991 | 11500 | 6000 | 600 | 60 | 4800 | 540 | 2540 | 11000 |
| | | | 1992 | 12600 | 7500 | 750 | 75 | 6000 | 675 | 3275 | 14400 |
| | | | 1993 | 13600 | 9000 | 900 | 90 | 7200 | 810 | 4410 | 18000 |
| | | | 1994 | 14700 | 10000 | 1000 | 100 | 8000 | 900 | 5700 | 21200 |
| | | | 1995 | 15900 | 11000 | 1100 | 110 | 8800 | 990 | 6990 | 24000 |
| | | | 1996 | 17100 | 11500 | 1150 | 115 | 9200 | 1035 | 8235 | 26000 |
| | | | 1997 | 18100 | 12600 | 1260 | 126 | 10080 | 1134 | 9134 | 28080 |
| | | | 1998 | 19100 | 13600 | 1360 | 136 | 10880 | 1224 | 10024 | 30160 |
| | | | 1999 | 20100 | 14700 | 1470 | 147 | 11760 | 1323 | 10523 | 32720 |
| | | | 2000 | 21100 | 15900 | 1590 | 159 | 12720 | 1431 | 11511 | 35360 |
| | | | 2001 | 22100 | 17100 | 1710 | 171 | 13680 | 1539 | 12419 | 38160 |
| | | | 2002 | 23100 | 18100 | 1810 | 181 | 14480 | 1629 | 13389 | 40880 |
| | | | 2003 | 24100 | 19100 | 1910 | 191 | 15280 | 1719 | 14439 | 43440 |
| | | | 2004 | 25100 | 20100 | 2010 | 201 | 16080 | 1809 | 15489 | 45840 |
| | | | 2005 | 26100 | 21100 | 2110 | 211 | 16880 | 1899 | 16379 | 48240 |

"Disposition and End-of-Life Options for Personal Computers", Matthews et al, Appendix A

| TOTAL IN USE (thousands) | CUM LANDFILLED (thousands) | LANDFILL VOLUME (acre ft.) | LANDFILL VOLUME (sq mile ft) | CUM SALES LANDFILLED (000s) | FRACTION LANDFILLED (%) | FRACTION LANDFILLED (% in use) |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1500 | 0 | 0 | 0.0 | 1500 | 0 | 0 |
| 3500 | 0 | 0 | 0.0 | 3500 | 0 | 0 |
| 6000 | 0 | 0 | 0.0 | 6000 | 0 | 0 |
| 9250 | 0 | 0 | 0.0 | 9250 | 0 | 0 |
| 13750 | 0 | 0 | 0.0 | 13750 | 0 | 0 |
| 18250 | 135 | 6 | 0.0 | 19750 | 1 | 1 |
| 23750 | 315 | 14 | 0.0 | 27250 | 1 | 1 |
| 30250 | 540 | 25 | 0.0 | 36250 | 1 | 2 |
| 37000 | 2033 | 93 | 0.1 | 46250 | 4 | 5 |
| 43500 | 4038 | 185 | 0.3 | 57250 | 7 | 9 |
| 49000 | 6578 | 302 | 0.5 | 68750 | 10 | 13 |
| 54100 | 9853 | 452 | 0.7 | 81350 | 12 | 18 |
| 58700 | 14263 | 655 | 1.0 | 94950 | 15 | 24 |
| 63400 | 19963 | 917 | 1.4 | 109650 | 18 | 31 |
| 68300 | 26953 | 1237 | 1.9 | 125550 | 21 | 39 |
| 73900 | 35188 | 1616 | 2.5 | 142650 | 25 | 48 |
| 79400 | 44322 | 2035 | 3.2 | 160750 | 28 | 56 |
| 84900 | 54346 | 2495 | 3.9 | 179850 | 30 | 64 |
| 90300 | 64869 | 2978 | 4.7 | 199950 | 32 | 72 |
| 95500 | 76380 | 3507 | 5.5 | 221050 | 35 | 80 |
| 100500 | 88799 | 4077 | 6.4 | 243150 | 37 | 88 |
| 105500 | 102188 | 4692 | 7.3 | 266250 | 38 | 97 |
| 110500 | 116627 | 5355 | 8.4 | 290350 | 40 | 106 |
| 115500 | 132116 | 6066 | 9.5 | 315450 | 42 | 114 |
| 120500 | 148495 | 6818 | 10.7 | 341550 | 43 | 123 |

1991 EPP "Design Issue for Waste Avoidance" Study Model - With Updated Sales Data

| Parameter | Units | Value | YEAR | NEW SALES (thousands) | NUM OBSOLETE (thousands) | NUM RESOLD (thousands) | NUM RECYCLED (thousands) | NUM SENT TO STOCKPILE (thousands) | NUM OBS LANDFILLED (thousands) | TOTAL LANDFILLED (thousands) |
|-----------------------|----------|-------|------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Lifetime of PC | years | 5 | 1981 | 1500 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| % Obsolete Resold | percent | 10 | 1982 | 2000 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| % Obsolete Recycled | percent | 1 | 1983 | 2500 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| % Obsolete Stockpiled | percent | 80 | 1984 | 3250 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| % Obsolete Landfilled | percent | 9 | 1985 | 4500 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Life of Stockpiled PC | years | 3 | 1986 | 6000 | 1500 | 150 | 15 | 1200 | 135 | 135 |
| Volume of PC | cu. ft | 2 | 1987 | 7500 | 2000 | 200 | 20 | 1600 | 180 | 180 |
| Power Cons of PC | watts | 200 | 1988 | 9000 | 2500 | 250 | 25 | 2000 | 225 | 225 |
| 1 sq mile ft | acre ft. | 640 | 1989 | 10000 | 3250 | 325 | 33 | 2600 | 293 | 1493 |
| 1 Acre ft | cu. ft | 43560 | 1990 | 11000 | 4500 | 450 | 45 | 3600 | 405 | 2005 |
| | | | 1991 | 12650 | 6000 | 600 | 60 | 4800 | 540 | 2540 |
| | | | 1992 | 14548 | 7500 | 750 | 75 | 6000 | 675 | 3275 |
| | | | 1993 | 16730 | 9000 | 900 | 90 | 7200 | 810 | 4410 |
| | | | 1994 | 19239 | 10000 | 1000 | 100 | 8000 | 900 | 5700 |
| | | | 1995 | 22125 | 11000 | 1100 | 110 | 8800 | 990 | 6990 |
| | | | 1996 | 25444 | 12650 | 1265 | 127 | 10120 | 1139 | 8339 |
| | | | 1997 | 29260 | 14548 | 1455 | 145 | 11638 | 1309 | 9309 |
| | | | 1998 | 33649 | 16730 | 1673 | 167 | 13384 | 1506 | 10306 |
| | | | 1999 | 38697 | 19239 | 1924 | 192 | 15391 | 1732 | 11852 |
| | | | 2000 | 44501 | 22125 | 2212 | 221 | 17700 | 1991 | 13629 |
| | | | 2001 | 51176 | 25444 | 2544 | 254 | 20355 | 2290 | 15674 |
| | | | 2002 | 58853 | 29260 | 2926 | 293 | 23408 | 2633 | 18025 |
| | | | 2003 | 67681 | 33649 | 3365 | 336 | 26919 | 3028 | 20728 |
| | | | 2004 | 77833 | 38697 | 3870 | 387 | 30957 | 3483 | 23838 |
| | | | 2005 | 89508 | 44501 | 4450 | 445 | 35601 | 4005 | 27413 |

| TOTAL STOCKPILED (thousands) | TOTAL IN USE (thousands) | CUM LANDFILLED (thousands) | LANDFILL VOLUME (acre ft.) | LANDFILL VOLUME (sq mile ft) | CUM SALES LANDFILLED (000s) | FRACTION LANDFILLED (%) | FRACTION LANDFILLED (% in use) |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 0 | 1500 | 0 | 0 | 0.0 | 1500 | 0 | 0 |
| 0 | 3500 | 0 | 0 | 0.0 | 3500 | 0 | 0 |
| 0 | 6000 | 0 | 0 | 0.0 | 6000 | 0 | 0 |
| 0 | 9250 | 0 | 0 | 0.0 | 9250 | 0 | 0 |
| 0 | 13750 | 0 | 0 | 0.0 | 13750 | 0 | 0 |
| 1200 | 18250 | 135 | 6 | 0.0 | 19750 | 1 | 1 |
| 2800 | 23750 | 315 | 14 | 0.0 | 27250 | 1 | 1 |
| 4800 | 30250 | 540 | 25 | 0.0 | 36250 | 1 | 2 |
| 6200 | 37000 | 2033 | 93 | 0.1 | 46250 | 4 | 5 |
| 8200 | 43500 | 4038 | 185 | 0.3 | 57250 | 7 | 9 |
| 11000 | 50150 | 6578 | 302 | 0.5 | 69900 | 9 | 13 |
| 14400 | 57198 | 9853 | 452 | 0.7 | 84448 | 12 | 17 |
| 18000 | 64927 | 14263 | 655 | 1.0 | 101177 | 14 | 22 |
| 21200 | 74166 | 19963 | 917 | 1.4 | 120416 | 17 | 27 |
| 24000 | 85291 | 26953 | 1237 | 1.9 | 142541 | 19 | 32 |
| 26920 | 98085 | 35291 | 1620 | 2.5 | 167985 | 21 | 36 |
| 30558 | 112798 | 44600 | 2048 | 3.2 | 197245 | 23 | 40 |
| 35142 | 129717 | 54906 | 2521 | 3.9 | 230894 | 24 | 42 |
| 40413 | 149175 | 66757 | 3065 | 4.8 | 269591 | 25 | 45 |
| 46475 | 171551 | 80387 | 3691 | 5.8 | 314092 | 26 | 47 |
| 53446 | 197284 | 96060 | 4410 | 6.9 | 365268 | 26 | 49 |
| 61463 | 226876 | 114085 | 5238 | 8.2 | 424121 | 27 | 50 |
| 70683 | 260907 | 134813 | 6190 | 9.7 | 491802 | 27 | 52 |
| 81285 | 300044 | 158651 | 7284 | 11.4 | 569635 | 28 | 53 |
| 93478 | 345050 | 186064 | 8543 | 13.3 | 659142 | 28 | 54 |

PC Disposition Model (6/2/97)

| General Parameters | Units | Value |
|---|--------------|--------------|
| Original Lifetime of PC | years | 5 |
| Parameters for Obsolete Machines | | |
| % Obsolete Reused | percent | 45 |
| % Obsolete Recycled | percent | 5 |
| % Obsolete Stored | percent | 45 |
| % Obsolete Landfilled | percent | 5 |

Data Sources:

Dataquest Sales Data (1981-1995) -via Statistical Abstract of the U.S.
 1996 Data Extrapolated with published 17% annual sales growth from 1995
 All Numbers below in Millions
 U.S. only!!

"Reused" = Reused, Resold, Reassigned
 "Stockpiled" = Stored, not used
 "Recycled" = Raw Mats Extraction

Parameters for Reused Machines

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|---------|----|--------|--------|
| Lifetime of Reused PC | years | 3 | | |
| % Reused Recycled | percent | 40 | Weight | lbs |
| % Reused Stored | percent | 50 | Volume | cu. ft |
| % Reused Landfilled | percent | 10 | | |

Landfill / Dimension Assumptions

| | | | | |
|---------------------------|--|----|-------|---------|
| Typical Desktop PC | | 50 | 23.00 | kg |
| | | 3 | 0.10 | cu mtrs |

Typical Notebook Computer

| | | | |
|--------|------|------|---------|
| Weight | 7.5 | 3.50 | kg |
| Volume | 0.14 | 0.00 | cu mtrs |

Parameters for Stored (Stockpiled) Machines

| | | | | |
|---------------------|---------|----|--------|---------|
| Time Stockpiled | years | 3 | | |
| % Stored Recycled | percent | 75 | Weight | lbs |
| % Stored Landfilled | percent | 25 | Volume | cu. ft. |

Weighted Average Computer (80/20)

| | | | |
|--------|-------|-------|---------|
| Weight | 41.5 | 19.10 | kg |
| Volume | 2.428 | 0.08 | cu mtrs |

| YEAR | SALES of NEW PCs | OBSOLETE PCs | FATE of OBSOLETE PCs | | | | FATE of REUSED PCs | | | |
|---------|---------------------|-----------------|----------------------|----------|--------|------------|--------------------|--------|------------|------|
| | | | REUSED | RECYCLED | STORED | LANDFILLED | RECYCLED | STORED | LANDFILLED | |
| 1980 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| 1981 | 1.50 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| 1982 | 2.57 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| 1983 | 6.19 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| 1984 | 7.74 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| 1985 | 6.39 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| 1986 | 7.03 | 1.50 | 0.68 | 0.08 | 0.68 | 0.08 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| 1987 | 8.67 | 2.57 | 1.16 | 0.13 | 1.16 | 0.13 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| 1988 | 10.00 | 6.19 | 2.78 | 0.31 | 2.78 | 0.31 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| 1989 | 9.33 | 7.74 | 3.48 | 0.39 | 3.48 | 0.39 | 0.27 | 0.34 | 0.07 | 0.07 |
| 1990 | 9.85 | 6.39 | 2.87 | 0.32 | 2.87 | 0.32 | 0.46 | 0.58 | 0.12 | 0.12 |
| 1991 | 10.18 | 7.03 | 3.16 | 0.35 | 3.16 | 0.35 | 1.11 | 1.39 | 0.28 | 0.28 |
| 1992 | 12.54 | 8.67 | 3.90 | 0.43 | 3.90 | 0.43 | 1.39 | 1.74 | 0.35 | 0.35 |
| 1993 | 14.76 | 10.00 | 4.50 | 0.50 | 4.50 | 0.50 | 1.15 | 1.44 | 0.29 | 0.29 |
| 1994 | 18.40 | 9.33 | 4.20 | 0.47 | 4.20 | 0.47 | 1.26 | 1.58 | 0.32 | 0.32 |
| 1995 | 22.50 | 9.85 | 4.43 | 0.49 | 4.43 | 0.49 | 1.56 | 1.95 | 0.39 | 0.39 |
| 1996 | 26.33 | 10.18 | 4.58 | 0.51 | 4.58 | 0.51 | 1.80 | 2.25 | 0.45 | 0.45 |
| 1997 | 30.27 | 12.54 | 5.64 | 0.63 | 5.64 | 0.63 | 1.68 | 2.10 | 0.42 | 0.42 |
| 1998 | 34.81 | 14.76 | 6.64 | 0.74 | 6.64 | 0.74 | 1.77 | 2.22 | 0.44 | 0.44 |
| 1999 | 40.04 | 18.40 | 8.28 | 0.92 | 8.28 | 0.92 | 1.83 | 2.29 | 0.46 | 0.46 |
| 2000 | 46.04 | 22.50 | 10.13 | 1.13 | 10.13 | 1.13 | 2.26 | 2.82 | 0.56 | 0.56 |
| 2001 | 52.95 | 26.33 | 11.85 | 1.32 | 11.85 | 1.32 | 2.66 | 3.32 | 0.66 | 0.66 |
| 2002 | 60.89 | 30.27 | 13.62 | 1.51 | 13.62 | 1.51 | 3.31 | 4.14 | 0.83 | 0.83 |
| 2003 | 70.03 | 34.81 | 15.67 | 1.74 | 15.67 | 1.74 | 4.05 | 5.06 | 1.01 | 1.01 |
| 2004 | 80.53 | 40.04 | 18.02 | 2.00 | 18.02 | 2.00 | 4.74 | 5.92 | 1.18 | 1.18 |
| 2005 | 92.61 | 46.04 | 20.72 | 2.30 | 20.72 | 2.30 | 5.45 | 6.81 | 1.36 | 1.36 |
| TOTALS: | | | 682.13 | 16.26 | 16.26 | 16.26 | 36.76 | | 9.19 | 9.19 |

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